YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)

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Criteria Scores

Population Trend	Range Trend	Population Size	Range Size	Endemism	Population Concentration	Threats
15	5	10	10	0	10	0

Special Concern Priority

Currently considered a Bird Species of Special Concern, Priority 2. Included on CDFG's (1992) unprioritized list and considered a Priority 3 species on the original prioritized list (Remsen 1978).

Breeding Bird Survey Statistics for California

Data inadequate for trend assessment (Sauer et al. 2001).

General Range and Abundance

The yellow rail's breeding range extends very locally from the boreal zone near the Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories east to James Bay and the Gaspe Peninsula of Quebec, and south through eastern Alberta and northeastern Montana, northern Wisconsin, northern Michigan and northern Maine. Its winter range extends from coastal North Carolina to Florida and west along the Gulf of Mexico to the central coast of Texas. The precise breeding and wintering ranges and relative abundances are difficult to fully discern due to the species' secretive behavior within its marsh habitat. (Bookhout 1995.) Isolated breeding populations were rediscovered in southern Oregon in 1982 and surveyed from 1988-1992. (Stern et al. 1993).

Seasonal Status in California

The yellow rail formerly (?) bred in Mono County, California. Most historical and recent records suggest that its status in coastal California was strictly as a winter visitor (Roberson and Patten 1997).

Historical Range and Abundance in California

Roberson and Patten (1997) summarized all yellow rail records accepted for California by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC). The yellow rail bred in the Long Valley (Dawson 1923) and Bridgeport areas in Mono County, at least in the 1920s-30s, and one found at Mono Lake County Park on 15 July 1985 may represent an unknown, local breeding population (Gaines 1992). April records from the late 19th Century in Quincy may indicate either a former breeding colony or spring migration through the northern Sierras. There is no information on its former breeding population size. Due to the fairly large numbers of wintering records along the coast, it was undoubtedly much more common there. Nearly all of the 57 historical records were from coastal and bay marshes from Humboldt County south to Newport Bay, Orange County. Five November and December records from 1908 and 1915 from Merced County suggest that yellow rails at least formerly wintered in the San Joaquin Valley. Other inland records come from Shandon, San Luis Obispo County 9 October 1917 and near Corona, Riverside County 31 January 1914 (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Recent Range and Abundance in California

Although the yellow rail is still considered extremely rare in California, recent records indicate that small populations may regular winter in coastal marshes. It has been fairly regular along Tomales Bay in Marin County with sightings of at least 11 individuals since 1986: no more than 10 individuals are estimated to occur there annually (Stallcup pers. comm.). Other records since 1970 come from coastal Humboldt (2 January 1987; 7-17 February 1987—latter record not reviewed by CBRC) and Mendocino counties (5 October 1995), Alameda (12 December 1985) and the Palo Alto Baylands (17 January 1988 and 12 December 1993) in the South San Francisco Bay, Grizzly Island in the Suisun Bay (February 2002), Pt. Pinos in Monterey County (2 October – 1 November 1970), near Lakeview, Riverside County (15-19 April 1978) (not reviewed by the CBRC), Manhatten Beach, Los Angeles County (20 October 1998) and Santee, San Diego County (16 December 1998)

(Harris 1996, Campbell et al. 1986, Campbell et al. 1988, Erickson and Terrill 1996, Stallcup pers. comm., Roberson 1985, Garrett and Dunn 1981, Erickson and Hamilton 2001).

Ecological Requirements

For breeding, yellow rails require sedge marshes/meadows with moist soil or shallow standing water. In winter, they require wet meadows and coastal marshes (Bookhout (1995). Probable breeding locations in southern Oregon were described as montane sedge meadows/marshes between 4,150-5,000 ft (1,266-1,524 m) in elevation, with water depths between 2-30 cm, with saturated and poorly-drained soils, and bordered by coniferous forests (Stern et al. 1993).

Threats

The yellow rail has been threatened by draining of sedge marshes for cattle grazing, by flooding of sedge marshes under reservoirs, by loss of tidal wetlands throughout coastal California, by mowing or plowing known or suspected wintering fields, and by predation from herons and egrets. Contaminants could threaten yellow rails directly through poisoning or indirectly through reducing the availability of prey, but this potential threat has yet to be studied.

Management and Research Recommendations

The highest conservation priority for the species is the preservation, protection and improvement of shallow, large sedge marshes with dense emergent vegetation. Protect existing patches of habitat used by breeding, wintering and dispersing yellow rails at sites identified as occupied habitat from recent records and during future monitoring studies. Evaluate current management practices on protected lands under federal or state jurisdiction to determine if they are adequate to maintain yellow rail habitat. If not, develop, fund, and implement management plans to ensure habitat is maintained. To the maximum extent practicable, redesign management and other activities to avoid loss of occupied and unoccupied habitat. Replace yellow rail habitat lost as a result of management and other activities. This compensatory restoration will replace the ecological functions of lost habitat areas, and shall be implemented before impacts on nesting habitat are incurred. Convert

non-habitat marsh acreage to least bittern habitat. Avoid construction-related and other activities (such as mowing wet fields) that could disturb yellow rails at known or potential breeding sites during their nesting season (May-September) or at known or potential wintering sites during their wintering season (October-May). Effects of heron and egret predation on yellow rails should be studied and, if effects are significant, should result in the development and adoption of an effective management plan to reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Monitoring Needs

All potential breeding locations in Siskiyou, Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, Alpine and Mono counties should be surveyed during the breeding season. Any birds found during these surveys should be monitored throughout the breeding season and in subsequent years. Land-use planning on state and federal lands for each potential breeding location should be reviewed.

Recent wintering locations should be surveyed during the winter season. Historical wintering locations with intact appropriate habitat should be surveyed during the winter season. Any birds found during these surveys should be monitored throughout the winter season and in subsequent years.

Acknowledgments

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